

ABC 20/20
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DOWNS: Up front tonight, an exclusive report on a first-class dangerous world of America's spies. Now for most of us, our sense of the eternal twists and turns in the game of spy versus spy comes from fiction. Tom Jarriel is here tonight, and Tom, you've been investigating one of those rare situations in which spies surface just enough for us to get a look at them anyway.

JARRIEL: And it's a very unusual look, Hugh, into the life and maybe even the death of a master spy for the Central Intelligence Agency.

DOWNS: That's what's intriguing. Maybe the death.

JARRIEL: This guy's life was so mysterious, it's not even sure that he is dead. The CIA won't confirm that he ever worked there.

DOWNS: What is certain is that he knew some of the nation's most important secrets, though.

JARRIEL: Definitely, from interviews with people who knew him and also, papers provided by his family for us, we are able to reveal some unusual details about his strange career. As is so often the case in a mystery like this, this story begins with the discovery of a corpse. The tranquility of the place belies the mystery and the nature of the death that occurred here. This is where the body was found, a remote Maryland farm, about one hour's drive outside of Washington, D.C. The date, Nov. 15th, 1982, and this is the body they found. State Police identified it as George Weiss, owner of the farm. (film clip) Police said Weiss killed himself in this garage, using a garden hose attached to the exhaust pipe, which pumped carbon monoxide fumes into the car where he sat. The Maryland state medical examiner agreed. The official ruling, suicide. Four days after the body was found, it was cremated, and the case was closed, but there's more to it than that. George Weiss's life and death are a complex puzzle whose pieces still don't fit. 20/20 has been investigating the death of George Weiss for 18 months, and two key points have emerged, never disclosed until now. Point one, there's evidence the body in the car was not that of George Weiss. Point two, Weiss was no ordinary CIA agent, but for 30 years had been one of this country's most important spies. Even after that, Weiss was in charge of protecting America's most sensitive nuclear secrets from terrorists and enemy agents. In the tradition of master spies, George Weiss was faceless, anonymous. DONALD WEISS (son): He was very, very high up, very high up. He was so important that nobody knows who he was. FRANK SNEPP (former CIA agent): He was the model CIA man, the model spy. He was a very effective operator, in fact, one of the most effective I've ever met. If you wanna talk about a John Le Carre character, you talk about George Weiss.

JARRIEL: This cable, found among his personal effects, was sent to Weiss by one of his CIA superiors, quote, 'There is no aspect of clandestine operations in which you were not heavily engaged... There are many in which your own approach and imagination accounted for an advance in the state of the art,' unquote. The list of George Weiss's CIA assignments around the world is a roster of espionage hot spots. In the '50s, it was postwar Berlin, 100 miles inside Communist

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